

26 March 1967

Sanitized - Approved For Release : CIA-RDP75-00001R000300430002-6
CPYRGT

Star of U.S. Expert on Viet in Eclipse

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World Journal Tribune Special

Saigon, March 25 (Gen. Edward G. Lansdale, the famous counter-insurgency expert whose star has waxed and waned in South Viet Nam, appears these days to be in eclipse.

Some reports say the 59-year-old soldier-diplomat will leave Viet Nam around May 1. Other reports say he will stay on, performing effectively behind the scenes.

Characteristically, Lansdale himself is maintaining a discreet silence.

One of the most interesting figures on the Viet Nam scene, Lansdale served as the model for both the hero of William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick's novel, "The Ugly American," and the villain of Graham Greene's book, "The Quiet American."

Lansdale has always been regarded with esteem by the Vietnamese whom he advised. But over the months, he has seemed out-of-phase with some of the top members of the United States embassy.

The tall, gray-haired general with the brush mustache came back to Viet Nam in September, 1965, along with the newly reassigned Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge.

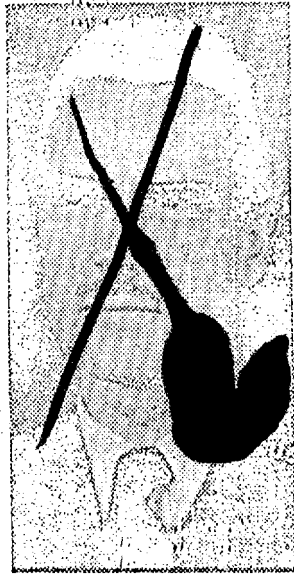
VAGUE TITLE

He was given the unusual and rather vague title of "senior liaison officer" in the U.S. embassy here.

The title carried with it ministerial rank in the protocol structure, and as such, Lansdale was a member of the 10-man "mission council," the top U.S. government team.

Previously, Lansdale had served as a special envoy of President Dwight D. Eisenhower to President Ngo Dinh Diem during the crucial 1954-56 period when Diem, against long odds, won out over the warring sects who challenged his regime.

It was Lansdale's advice to Diem during this controversial



GEN. EDWARD LANSDALE

period that led to his being diametrically depicted in the two best-selling novels of Americans in Southeast Asia.

In effect, "The Ugly American" praised his abilities to get along with the Vietnamese and understand their problems in their own terms, while "The Quiet American" damned him for meddling in Vietnamese political affairs.

WARNED DIEM

Lansdale later soured on Diem and warned the autocratic president that he must inaugurate social reforms in the countryside or face an upsurge of Communist activity.

Lansdale's fears came to pass.

As a young Air Force colonel, whose assignments took him in and out of the intelligence branch of the service, Lansdale was a close adviser to Ramon Magsaysay, the president of the Philippines who defeated the Communist Huk uprising in Luzon.

Between tours in Viet Nam, Lansdale served as a counter-insurgency adviser to Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara. In Viet Nam, Lansdale became known for avoiding offi-

cial channels and dealing directly and privately with Vietnamese officials.

The Vietnamese refer to Lansdale as "Mister Go-Between."

While the Vietnamese officials might not feel at ease with their American opposite numbers, they feel comfortable going to Lansdale with their problems and grievances.

However, this role of Lansdale's did not sit particularly well with those U.S. officials who insisted that business with the Vietnamese be conducted according to the book.

INFLUENCE REDUCED

But as the size of the American mission expanded—and became more conventionalized—Lansdale's influence seemed to be correspondingly reduced.

The broad program of pacification was placed under the over-all responsibility of Deputy Ambassador William J. Porter, who has acquitted himself well and won the loyalty and respect of those who work for him.

Little was heard about Lansdale.

His last public effort was in persuading Premier Nguyen Cao Ky to include a broad program of social reforms in his presentation to the Honolulu conference in February 1966.

But friends say he played an effective role in organizing and advising on the national elections for the constituent assembly in September 1966.

A few months ago, when American field operations were reorganized within the U.S. mission, Lansdale was offered command of one of the four regions—which were considered

choice plums and positions of great importance.

For reasons of his own he turned down the job. It was said that he felt his influence as an adviser to Vietnamese would be vitiated if he had to work closely with a Vietnamese corps commander who did not have the respect of the people.

Whatever the case, once Lansdale declined the offer of an operative assignment, his influence within the U.S. mission seemed to evaporate.

Whether he will stay on to play an effective behind-scenes role remains to be seen.

Washington Post-L.A. Times Service